

4. Solving life's dilemmas

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When you check the definition of the word 'dilemma', you would find this:

"A situation that requires a choice between options that are or seem equally unfavorable or mutually exclusive."

I am sure that all of us had to face our share of dilemmas in our lives and all of us will share more in future. Wouldn't it be nice if making decisions simple and clear the way we want? However, it never will be until we get to heaven. Because in the equation of our dilemmas, we must realize that we have our flesh, emotion and other people with their own flesh and emotion.

Dilemmas are complicated, fuzzy, headscratching predicaments that refuse to be resolved with a simplistic "this is right and that's wrong" kind of approach. Why? Because there are always advantages and disadvantages to both sides in a dilemma. No matter which side we choose, we lose something. There's no clear winner in these kinds of decisions. And that's why, to use an old expression, dilemmas put us between a rock-and-a-hard-place dilemma.

In our lesson tonight, we'll find the apostle Paul wrestling with a similar rock-and-a-hard-place dilemma.

A. PAUL'S PERSONAL DILEMMA

Philippians 1:21-23 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

Paul knew that death is not a defeat to the Christian or a final place where they are lost forever. It is merely a transition from earthly limitation to heavenly glory which is a net gain for the Christian.

Oh, how much all the Christians should embrace this knowledge! Many born-again Christians are afraid to die. For some reasons, they know that there is eternity waiting for them in heaven as book knowledge, but they are not that excited about being there. They'd rather be here on earth where troubles and problems mount up everyday. Someone who is wise said, "Unless you are ready to die, you really cannot live."

The thought of martyrdom didn't depress Paul, however. In fact, he is dying to be in heaven with Jesus, unshackled and free. Dying really would be a "gain" to Paul. And that's the essence of his dilemma.

As in all dilemmas, both sides of the issue have benefits and liabilities. Let's take a brief look at what some of these were for Paul.

Option 1: To Depart

Benefit: In Paul's mind, the gain of dying was that he would instantly be with Christ, free from the frustrations and pain of this world. No more stonings, beatings, and imprisonments. No more thorn in the flesh; no more living with constant danger, hunger, thirst, and sleepless nights of hardship. He would have unending peace instead, in a place of perfection, in the very presence of God. He would know the fullness of joy and experience eternal pleasures from God's own hand.

Liability: Paul knew, however, that to be with Jesus meant that he would be absent from those who needed him. The Philippians were his spiritual children, and such a loss might hamper their growth. Also, he would no longer be a witness to his Roman guards day after day, nor would he reach any others for Christ through missionary journeys. The infant church, which relied on his authority and guidance, would lose of their great champion as well.

Option 2. To Remain

Benefit: By staying, Paul knew he could continue nurturing the Philippians' growth and maturity in the Lord. This would not only give them greater security and hope for the future, it would also bring Paul much joy in their relationship. His writing ministry, too, would continue, bringing God's grace and truth to countless generations he would never see.

Liability: To stay obviously meant Paul would remain chained to Rome instead of going home to heaven.

B. NOT WHAT I WANT, BUT WHAT GOD WANTS

Philippians 1:24-26 Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. 25 And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, 26 that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.

What a man Paul is! He is willing to postpone going to heaven in order to help Christians grow, and he even is willing to go to hell in order to win the lost to Christ.

Romans 9:1-3 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh,

Philippians 1:21 becomes a valuable test of our lives. "For to me to live is _____ and to die is _____." Fill in the blanks yourself.

"For to me to live is money and to die is to leave it all behind."

"For to me to live is fame and to die is to be forgotten."

"For to me to live is power and to die is to lose it all."

No, we must echo Paul's convictions if we are going to have joy in spite of circumstances, and if we are going to share in the furtherance of the Gospel.

Paul was confident that God intended him to be fruitful. Sadly, many Christians have not yet come to the place where it is a certainty that they will bear fruit for the kingdom of God with their lives.

Yet, Paul recognized, and undoubtedly sensed in his spirit, that his work was not yet done. In fact, Paul survived this imprisonment, was set free, and was martyred later at Rome. He did come to the Philippians again.

If there is anyone, it would be apostle Paul who could understand why godly Christian moms and dads would like to be around their young children on earth than going to heaven right away.

This brings us an important point. Do we seek God's will over ours or the other way around? Jesus showed us a great example at the Garden of Gethsemane. He didn't

demand to the Father that He wanted an easy way out. Rather He submitted His will to the Father in heaven.

If we do the will of God, then we will invest “the rest of our time” in that which is lasting and satisfying. But if we give in to the world around us, we will waste “the rest of our time” and regret it when we stand before Jesus.

The will of God comes from the heart of God and it is an expression of the love of God. We may not always understand what He is doing, but we know that He is doing what is best for us. We do not live on explanations, but we live on His promises.

C. NOT A PLAYGROUND, BUT A BATTLEGROUND

Philippians 1:27-30 Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God. 29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, 30 having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.

The Christian life is not a playground, rather it is a battleground. We are God’s soldiers defending the faith of the Gospel.

Jude calls it “*the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*”. Paul warns in 1 Timothy 4:1 that “*in latter times some will depart from the faith.*”

Jude 3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

1 Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,

This is why the church must engage in a Bible teaching ministry, so that each new generation of believers will know, appreciate and use the great heritage of the faith. But there is an enemy who is out to steal the treasure from God’s people.

What we believe determines how we behave, and wrong belief ultimately means a wrong life. Each local church is but one generation short of potential extinction. No wonder satan attacks our young people in particular, seeking to get them away from “the faith in christ Jesus.”

How can a group of Christians fight this enemy? For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh. We must use spiritual weapons – the Word of God and prayer. We must depend on the Holy Spirit to give us the power that we need.

Having committed himself to remain, Paul immediately issues a challenge to stay together in unity and harmony.

The Greek word ‘*terrified*’ literally pictures a war horse terrifying away from the battlefield. The Philippians aren’t to go out looking for trouble, but when conflicts flare up, there is no reason that they should be terrified or hesitant. And the Apostle gives them several reasons why.

1) They're not alone.

They are to strive together for the Gospel. It's frightening to face opposition alone, but there's comfort in having others on our side.

2) Paul gives them the subtle assurance that, ultimately, the victory is theirs.

God is the Author of the Gospel. Those who defend it may expect deliverance and victory from Him as surely as those who resist it may expect to incur His judgment.

3) The Philippians shouldn't be alarmed by their opponents because God has granted that His followers should suffer for His sake.

This is a painful but helpful reminder. Let's not opposition and suffering catch us off guard. Rather, prepare for them by expecting it.

4) Paul helps calm the Philippians' fears with the reminder that the conflicts they face, he has faced too.

Hope and encouragement often come in just knowing that someone else has already been through what you're currently experiencing.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) Just because the road we are planning to take is godly, it doesn't mean that it is God's will for us to go in that direction.

2) Just because satan attacks us, it doesn't mean that we have to give up what we are called to do by God.

1 John 4:4b He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

3) Even though we face difficulties in our lives, it does not mean others have not experienced what we are going through. As a matter of fact, the difficulties we experience are custom tailored for our spiritual growth and molded after our Lord Jesus by God the Father.